U: Petrullo E-8 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

Without the aid of the Yaruros the crossing of the Orinoco would have been impossible. They are expert canoeists and safely ferried our baggage to the other side. Believing that I could handle a canoe, for by this time according to the Yaruros there wasn't anything that I could not do, since their gods had told them that I was one of them, I was asked to cross in an empty canoe, with the help of a 12-year-old boy. The canoe had several gaping holes in stern and bow about 10 inches in diameter. With serious misgivings, I embarked with the youngster paddling in the bow. Cross-currents, winds, and whirlpools made the half hour a very exciting one. Several times I gave up hope of crossing safely or of returning to our starting point, only to be encouraged by the laughter of my young companion who, when we were in extreme danger, would turn and grin happily at me. However, we crossed safely and soon afterwards we hoisted sail, which consisted of my mosquito net tied to an improvised mast, and with the east wind behind us and with gunwales even with the water, we went flying up the Capanaparo. Our sailing was far from being monotonous, for every few minutes it was necessary to use strength and skill to keep the canoe upright. Three days later we reached Landaeta's camp.

The trip to Urbana had been exciting and interesting, but I brought back with me ulcers on my feet which incapacitated me for the rest of my stay with the Yaruros. My feet, swollen to immense proportions and with open sores, refused to support my body, and I was forced to forego any further trips, short or long. My life consisted from now on, for about six weeks, of lying on the sand or in a hammock, surrounded by my affectionate friends, talking about the universe, the Yaruros, and their ideas.

In order to make it possible for Landaeta and his people to stay with me on this particular beach rather than move about in search of food, I turned over all of my food stock to them, which was consumed in two days, and thereafter they shared equally with me the products of the hunt. From that day on, I was completely in their care and Landaeta never left me. The burden of hunting fell on the younger men who went out every morning in search of crocodiles and turtles, of honey, palm nuts, roots, and fish. My illness was of great concern to the Yaruros. They did what they could to make me comfortable and they went to special trouble to bring titbits, such as honey and nuts. Landaeta and a woman shaman sang over me often. This illness was a fortunate event in a way, for it permitted an uninterrupted intimacy between us.

There is a sharp contrast between the simple primitive material culture of the Yaruros and the wealth and poetic intensity of the spiritual. The casual visitor would see merely a naked people plying

1: Petrullo E-3 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

CANOES

[481] 501 502 868

The Yaruros dislike to travel any distance afoot. The canoe, therefore, is practically his only means of transportation. As a result, they are extraordinarily good canoemen, learning both how to build and to manage one from childhood. It is not an uncommon sight to see little children of 5 or 6 years of age paddling furiously in midstream. Their expertness can best be illustrated by the following incident: The llanos are exposed to the trade winds in the dry season, which at times blow very hard. On our return from La Urbana we found the crossing of the Orinoco to the mouth of the Capanaparo a dangerous undertaking.

The Yaruro dugouts are clumsy affairs at best, but in addition to that, ours had a gaping hole about 10 inches in diameter in the stern and it was with some qualms that I stepped into it to negotiate the rather rough waters with the help of a 12-year-old boy. Since the Yaruro steers from the bow, that place of honor was allotted to the youngster, I furnishing the power. During the passage across I despaired several times of being able to hold the canoe in the right direction, but whenever we found ourselves caught in some especially difficult whirlpool this lad would turn and laugh, not in derision but in encouragement, which was calculated, I suppose, to bolster my spirit, but helped not at all in easing the strain on my arms. His knowledge of the currents and his proper timing in signaling to me to paddle one way or the other, as well as deft steering, finally got us across safely. When this incident was over and I looked back over the rough waters, my respect for Yaruro canoemanship increased manifold.

502 177

Sails are used on the Orinoco and its tributaries, both by the occasional traders and crocodile hunters. The Yaruros have had ample opportunities over several centuries to learn how to make use of them. In fact, some of the younger men who worked occasionally for the ranchers, or traders, do know how. However, in their daily plying up and down the rivers, hunting and fishing, they never employ the sail.

[181]

Their conservatism is further illustrated by another fact. The Racionales will always pole their canoes when traveling upstream. The Yaruros know how to do this also, but only when they are working for someone else. In their everyday life they depend entirely on the paddle.

502 000

The steersman generally sits in the bow, especially when moving downstream and the paddler is alone, pulling the canoe after him. The paddler in the stern, if one is present, really furnishes the motive power. The Yaruro generally paddles sitting down in the bot-

1: Petrullo E-3 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

516 the Yaruro generally paddles sitting down in the bot-
502 tom of the canoe on several cross sticks without any back rest or any foot rest on which to brace himself. To one not accustomed to such a position it is clumsy and painful, and easily fatiguing. The paddler's stroke is short, quick, and choppy, like that of many South American tribes in Brazil.

SHELTER

362 Yaruro shelter is the simplest thing in the world. Nothing simpler could be devised. Shunning the forest and camping only on the open beaches by the river, the shelter is devised for two purposes—to protect the family from the winds, the insects, the sun,
342 and in the rainy season from the rain. They make, therefore, a variety of shelters. The camp shelter for daytime in the dry season consists of branches thrust vertically into the sands. If there are any persons about camp during the day, which there are generally, they will sit in the shade of these branches, moving around them as the sun changes its position in the sky. At night they dig holes in the sand and lie in them, protecting themselves from the winds by a shelter of branches or basketry at the head. These shelters, however, must allow a certain amount of wind to come through in order to prevent the gathering of large swarms of insects. Sleeping in holes in the sand, they keep warm, since the dry winds make it quite
361 chilly at night. All of the Yaruro in the Capanaparo are too no-
364 madic to build better shelter than the types described, since they stay in one camp only a few days, generally two or three. They move about so much, both for the lack of game in the area and the refuse that accumulates around camp, even though the vultures can always be seen feasting upon the remains of crocodile and turtle. The Yaruro are aware that if they stay too close to such piles of refuse they may become infected.

101 However, the Yaruro living on Linda Bara, the islands at the
361 mouth of the Capanaparo, have such an abundance of food that they
342 make somewhat more permanent structures. This consists generally of a low hemispherical structure covered with palm leaves which reach to about 2 feet from the ground, leaving the interior open to the winds, but even these structures are abandoned in a few weeks because of the insect life. This is the type of structure that is employed during the rainy season when life becomes more sedentary.

POTTERY

317 At certain places along the banks of the Capanaparo the proper
323 clay is found for pottery. The type preferred is whitish in color. Generally a small quantity of yellowish red clay is mixed with it.